

# **PUBLIC DOMAIN POETRY**

## **JULY 2015**

by:

Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall

Walt Whitman

H.D.

Paul Verlaine

Lord Byron

Langston Hughes

Sappho

Vita Sackville-West

Rupert Brooke

Vachel Lindsay

Emily Dickinson

## DRIFTING

It is sweet to lie in a boat,  
And drift with the languid stream,  
With body and soul afloat  
The lake of a perfect dream.

It is sweet in the afternoon,  
With just the breath of a breeze,  
If the time be the month of June  
And the birds sing low in the trees.

And the mind has a pleasant thought,  
And the heart has a fond desire,  
And the soul is a tissue wrought  
Of youth, and it's golden fire.

And the limbs are both clean and strong,  
And able to rest with joy,  
And our time in the world is long,  
With nothing that can destroy

The rapture of God's green earth,  
The throb and the ecstasy  
That springs into life with birth,  
And lives through eternity.

from Project Gutenberg's  
*'Twixt Earth and Stars*, by Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall

## To You

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,  
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands,

Even now your features, joys, speech, house, trade, manners,  
troubles, follies, costume, crimes, dissipate away from you,  
Your true soul and body appear before me.

They stand forth out of affairs, out of commerce, shops, work,  
farms, clothes, the house, buying, selling, eating, drinking,  
suffering, dying.

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem,

I whisper with my lips close to your ear.

I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you.

O I have been dilatory and dumb,

I should have made my way straight to you long ago,

I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you.

I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you,

None has understood you, but I understand you,

None has done justice to you, you have not done justice to yourself,

None but has found you imperfect, I only find no imperfection in you,

None but would subordinate you, I only am he who will never consent to subordinate you,

I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God,  
beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.

Painters have painted their swarming groups and the centre-figure of all,

From the head of the centre-figure spreading a nimbus of gold-color'd light,

But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-color'd light,

From my hand from the brain of every man and woman it streams,

effulgently flowing forever.

O I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you!  
You have not known what you are, you have slumber'd upon yourself  
all your life,  
Your eyelids have been the same as closed most of the time,  
What you have done returns already in mockeries,  
(Your thrift, knowledge, prayers, if they do not return in  
mockeries, what is their return?)

The mockeries are not you,  
Underneath them and within them I see you lurk,  
I pursue you where none else has pursued you,  
Silence, the desk, the flippant expression, the night, the  
accustom'd routine, if these conceal you from others or from  
yourself, they do not conceal you from me,  
The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, if these  
balk others they do not balk me,  
The pert apparel, the deform'd attitude, drunkenness, greed,  
premature death, all these I part aside.

There is no endowment in man or woman that is not tallied in you,  
There is no virtue, no beauty in man or woman, but as good is in you,  
No pluck, no endurance in others, but as good is in you,  
No pleasure waiting for others, but an equal pleasure waits for you.

As for me, I give nothing to any one except I give the like carefully  
to you,  
I sing the songs of the glory of none, not God, sooner than I sing  
the songs of the glory of you.

Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazard!  
These shows of the East and West are tame compared to you,  
These immense meadows, these interminable rivers, you are immense  
and interminable as they,  
These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent  
dissolution, you are he or she who is master or mistress over them,  
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain,

passion, dissolution.

The hopples fall from your ankles, you find an unfailing sufficiency,  
Old or young, male or female, rude, low, rejected by the rest,  
    whatever you are promulges itself,  
Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided, nothing  
    is scanted,  
Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance, ennui, what you are  
    picks its way.

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Leaves of Grass*, by Walt Whitman

## THE CLIFF TEMPLE

### I

Great, bright portal,  
shelf of rock,  
rocks fitted in long ledges,  
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,  
to lighter rock--  
clean cut, white against white.

High--high--and no hill-goat  
tramples--no mountain-sheep  
has set foot on your fine grass;  
you lift, you are the world-edge,  
pillar for the sky-arch.

The world heaved--  
we are next to the sky:  
over us, sea-hawks shout,  
gulls sweep past--  
the terrible breakers are silent  
from this place.

Below us, on the rock-edge,  
where earth is caught in the fissures  
of the jagged cliff,  
a small tree stiffens in the gale,  
it bends--but its white flowers  
are fragrant at this height.

And under and under,  
the wind booms:  
it whistles, it thunders,  
it growls--it presses the grass  
beneath its great feet.

## II

I said:  
for ever and for ever, must I follow you  
through the stones?  
I catch at you--you lurch:  
you are quicker than my hand-grasp.

I wondered at you.  
I shouted--dear--mysterious--beautiful--  
white myrtle-flesh.

I was splintered and torn:  
the hill-path mounted  
swifter than my feet.

Could a daemon avenge this hurt,  
I would cry to him--could a ghost,  
I would shout--O evil,  
follow this god,  
taunt him with his evil and his vice.

## III

Shall I hurl myself from here,  
shall I leap and be nearer you?  
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,  
ankle against ankle?  
Would you pity me, O white breast?

If I woke, would you pity me,  
would our eyes meet?

Have you heard,  
do you know how I climbed this rock?  
My breath caught, I lurched forward--

stumbled in the ground-myrtle.

Have you heard, O god seated on the cliff,  
how far toward the ledges of your house,  
how far I had to walk?

#### IV

Over me the wind swirls.  
I have stood on your portal  
and I know--  
you are further than this,  
still further on another cliff.

From The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Sea Garden*, by Hilda Doolittle



## IL BACIO

KISS! Hollyhock in Love's luxuriant close!  
Brisk music played on pearly little keys;  
In tempo with the witching melodies  
Love in the ardent heart repeating goes.

Sonorous, graceful Kiss, hail! Kiss divine!  
Unequalled boon, unutterable bliss!  
Man, bent o'er thine enthralling chalice, Kiss,  
Grows drunken with a rapture only thine!

Thou comfortest as music does, and wine,  
And grief dies smothered in thy purple fold.  
Let one greater than I, Kiss, and more bold,  
Rear thee a classic, monumental line.

Humble Parisian bard, this infantile  
Bouquet of rhymes I tender half in fear. . . .  
Be gracious, and in guerdon, on the dear  
Red lips of One I know, a light and smile!

by Paul Verlaine  
from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*A Vers de Société Anthology*, by Various

## TO GEORGE, EARL DELAWARR.

1.

Oh! yes, I will own we were dear to each other;  
The friendships of childhood, though fleeting, are true;  
The love which you felt was the love of a brother,  
Nor less the affection I cherish'd for you.

2.

But Friendship can vary her gentle dominion;  
The attachment of years, in a moment expires:  
Like Love, too, she moves on a swift-waving pinion,  
But glows not, like Love, with unquenchable fires.

3.

Full oft have we wander'd through Ida together,  
And blest were the scenes of our youth, I allow:  
In the spring of our life, how serene is the weather!  
But Winter's rude tempests are gathering now.

4.

No more with Affection shall Memory blending,  
The wonted delights of our childhood retrace:  
When Pride steels the bosom, the heart is unbending,  
And what would be Justice appears a disgrace.

5.

However, dear George, for I still must esteem you--  
The few, whom I love, I can never upbraid;  
The chance, which has lost, may in future redeem you,  
Repentance will cancel the vow you have made.

6.

I will not complain, and though chill'd is affection,  
With me no corroding resentment shall live:  
My bosom is calm'd by the simple reflection,  
That both may be wrong, and that both should forgive.

7.

You knew, that my soul, that my heart, my existence,  
If danger demanded, were wholly your own;  
You knew me unalter'd, by years or by distance,  
Devoted to love and to friendship alone.

8.

You knew,--but away with the vain retrospection!  
The bond of affection no longer endures;  
Too late you may droop o'er the fond recollection,  
And sigh for the friend, who was formerly yours.

9.

For the present, we part,--I will hope not for ever;  
For time and regret will restore you at last:  
To forget our dissension we both should endeavour,  
I ask no atonement, but days like the past.

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Byron's Poetical Works, Vol. 1*, by Lord Byron

## THE NEGRO

I am a Negro:  
Black as the night is black,  
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I've been a slave:  
Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.  
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:  
Under my hand the pyramids arose.  
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:  
All the way from Africa to Georgia I  
carried my sorrow songs.  
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim :  
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.  
They lynch me now in Texas.

I am a Negro:  
Black as the night is black,  
Black like the depths of my Africa,

by Langston Hughes  
from *The Crisis*, Vol 23-24  
pre-1923

## LXVI

What the west wind whispers  
At the end of summer,  
When the barley harvest  
Ripens to the sickle,  
Who can tell?

What means the fine music  
Of the dry cicada,  
Through the long noon hours  
Of the autumn stillness,  
Who can say?

How the grape ungathered  
With its bloom of blueness  
Greatens on the trellis  
Of the brick-walled garden,  
Who can know?

Yet I, too, am greatened,  
Keep the note of gladness,  
Travel by the wind's road,  
Through this autumn leisure,--  
By thy love.

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Sappho: One Hundred Lyrics*, [translated] by Bliss Carman

## **Phedre**

(To Sarah Bernhardt)

How vain and dull this common world must seem  
To such a One as thou, who should'st have talked  
At Florence with Mirandola, or walked  
Through the cool olives of the Academe:  
Thou should'st have gathered reeds from a green stream  
For Goat-foot Pan's shrill piping, and have played  
With the white girls in that Phaeacian glade  
Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay  
Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again  
Back to this common world so dull and vain,  
For thou wert weary of the sunless day,  
The heavy fields of scentless asphodel,  
The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

from The Project Gutenberg Etext of  
*Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde*

## DISILLUSION

I WROTE the burning words to you  
That meant so much to me.  
I sent them speeding straight to you,  
To you across the sea;  
I waited with sure reckoning  
For your reply to me.

I waited, and the counted day  
Fruitlessly came and went;  
I made excuse for the delay,  
Pitiable confident.  
I knew to-morrow's light must bring  
The words you must have sent.

And still I stand on that dim verge  
And look across the sea;  
The waves have changed into a dirge  
Their volubility.  
And in my disillusioned heart  
Is a little grave for me.

But still with shaded eyes I gaze  
As mournfully I sing,  
And one by one the trailing days,  
As they no message bring,  
Fall with their slow monotony  
As beads fall from a string.

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Poems of West & East*, by Vita Sackville-West



## **Lines Written in the Belief That the Ancient Roman Festival of the Dead Was Called Ambarvalia**

Swings the way still by hollow and hill,  
And all the world's a song;  
"She's far," it sings me, "but fair," it rings me,  
"Quiet," it laughs, "and strong!"

Oh! spite of the miles and years between us,  
Spite of your chosen part,  
I do remember; and I go  
With laughter in my heart.

So above the little folk that know not,  
Out of the white hill-town,  
High up I clamber; and I remember;  
And watch the day go down.

Gold is my heart, and the world's golden,  
And one peak tipped with light;  
And the air lies still about the hill  
With the first fear of night;

Till mystery down the soundless valley  
Thunders, and dark is here;  
And the wind blows, and the light goes,  
And the night is full of fear,

And I know, one night, on some far height,  
In the tongue I never knew,  
I yet shall hear the tidings clear  
From them that were friends of you.

They'll call the news from hill to hill,  
Dark and uncomforted,  
Earth and sky and the winds; and I  
Shall know that you are dead.

I shall not hear your trentals,  
Nor eat your arval bread;  
For the kin of you will surely do  
Their duty by the dead.

Their little dull greasy eyes will water;  
They'll paw you, and gulp afresh.  
They'll snuffle and weep, and their thoughts will creep  
Like flies on the cold flesh.

They will put pence on your grey eyes,  
Bind up your fallen chin,  
And lay you straight, the fools that loved you  
Because they were your kin.

They will praise all the bad about you,  
And hush the good away,  
And wonder how they'll do without you,  
And then they'll go away.

But quieter than one sleeping,  
And stranger than of old,  
You will not stir for weeping,  
You will not mind the cold;

But through the night the lips will laugh not,  
The hands will be in place,  
And at length the hair be lying still  
About the quiet face.

With snuffle and sniff and handkerchief,  
And dim and decorous mirth,  
With ham and sherry, they'll meet to bury  
The lordliest lass of earth.

The little dead hearts will tramp ungrieving  
Behind lone-riding you,  
The heart so high, the heart so living,  
Heart that they never knew.

I shall not hear your trentals,  
Nor eat your arval bread,  
Nor with smug breath tell lies of death  
To the unanswering dead.

With snuffle and sniff and handkerchief,  
The folk who loved you not  
Will bury you, and go wondering  
Back home. And you will rot.

But laughing and half-way up to heaven,  
With wind and hill and star,  
I yet shall keep, before I sleep,  
Your Ambarvalia.

from The Project Gutenberg Etext of  
Rupert Brooke's *Collected Poems*

## **Abraham Lincoln walks at Midnight.**

(In Springfield, Illinois)

It is portentous, and a thing of state  
That here at midnight, in our little town  
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,  
Near the old court-house pacing up and down,

Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards  
He lingers where his children used to play,  
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones  
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.

A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,  
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl  
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,  
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.  
He is among us: -- as in times before!  
And we who toss and lie awake for long  
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.  
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?  
Too many peasants fight, they know not why,  
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.  
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.  
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now  
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn  
Shall come; -- the shining hope of Europe free:

The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth,  
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,  
That all his hours of travail here for men  
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace  
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

by Vachel Lindsay  
from The Project Gutenberg Etext of  
*The Second Book of Modern Verse*  
Ed. Jessie B. Rittenhouse

## XX.

I taste a liquor never brewed,  
From tankards scooped in pearl;  
Not all the vats upon the Rhine  
Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,  
And debauchee of dew,  
Reeling, through endless summer days,  
From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee  
Out of the foxglove's door,  
When butterflies renounce their drams,  
I shall but drink the more!

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,  
And saints to windows run,  
To see the little tippler  
Leaning against the sun!

by Emily Dickinson  
from Project Gutenberg's  
*Poems: Three Series, Complete*

## **Stonewall's Eve**

The fading summer light seeps  
through the magnolia leaves,  
dancing in mid-air with the  
graceful, arching oak branch  
as a breeze from the gulf  
cuts into the dry heat

by Matt Pierard

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